MORAL INTEGRITY

PETER WINCH

Inaugural Lecture in the Chair of Philosophy
Delivered at King's College London 9 May 1968

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THOUGH John Findlay was not the first occupant of this Chair, he was in effect the creator of the Department of Philosophy at King's College. I think well enough of my subject to say that the College owes him much for this. Philosophy is a subject which means many different things to different people and which needs the existence of practitioners of strongly individual points of view if it is to flourish. It is also peculiarly vulnerable to waves of fashion, which are a constant threat to vigorous and healthy discussion. Findlay's point of view in philosophy is certainly strongly individual and he has always been deeply suspicious of attitudes which are merely fashionable. The direction which philosophical studies have taken in the University of London at large, as well as at King's, has been strongly influenced by Findlay during his tenure of this Chair. The study of aspects of the subject which would otherwise have languished—such as the work of Hegel and the Phenomenological Movement—was kept going at one time, I think it is almost true to say, single-handedly by Findlay. Since coming to King's I have been struck by the number of post-graduate students who have wanted to come here to work on matters with which only Findlay could help them. That is a gap which it would be foolish of me even to try to fill. There are indeed signs that some of the things in philosophy which have most interested Findlay are now coming back into fashion amongst young philosophers. Perhaps it is no accident that he should have chosen this moment to move on.

Of course, he is very far from having retired from the philosophical scene; he has simply moved on to another part of it. Before coming to London he had already had a range of experience of academic life with which few, surely, can

compete. He had taught philosophy in South Africa, New Zealand and the North of England. And his thirst for new experience is obviously unslaked—since crossing to the United States he has already moved from Texas to Connecticut. It is clear, too, from his recently published Gifford Lectures that his contributions of fresh ideas to the subject are, if anything, only now coming into full flow. And this is certainly not to imply that they have at any time deserved the name of a trickle.

Our best wishes go with him to Yale.

Some expression of appreciation towards his predecessor is rightly expected of a new professor. To stop there, though, might suggest that he springs into his Chair, as it were fully armed from the head of Zeus. Of course everybody knows that he, as well as his Chair, has a history, but I should like to make explicit acknowledgment of it in my own case by mentioning the incalculable debt I owe to those who have taught me. It would take too long, as well as being too embarrassing, to try to do this by name. However, any philosopher will realize that the list would include not merely those who were formally in charge of my education, but countless colleagues and students past and present as well. My regret is that I have never been clever or diligent enough to learn as much from them as they have offered.

In view of the title of this lecture, and so that you do not find yourselves on the edge of your seats waiting for me to start talking about moral integrity, I must explain that I shall not be attempting an 'analysis' of this concept. In fact I shall not use the expression 'moral integrity' again in this lecture. What I have to say, though, does have a lot to do with this concept, as I hope will be clear. My subject is the relation of a man to his acts, and I discuss it in connection with certain very fundamental difficulties facing a philosopher who wishes to give an account of morality. But of course much more than this is involved in asking what it is to act and there are

very many relevant issues which I cannot possibly claim to discuss. But to give what follows a perspective, I want to sketch a caricature of a certain way of looking at the relation between a man and his acts, which I suspect is secretly at work in the writings of many philosophers who would certainly disclaim my caricature, if it were explicitly put to them. It is a view which the considerations that I shall try to develop count against, though I shall not have time to make this point very explicit.

The idea is of an action as a change in the world which the agent brings about. This may involve changes which are brought about 'indirectly' by a movement of the agent's body, or it may simply *be* a movement of the agent's body. Even in the latter case, though, this movement is thought of as 'brought about' by the agent. The picture of the agent involved here is, as it were, of a spectator of a world which includes his own body; though this spectator is also able, to a limited extent, to effect changes in the world he observes. So he needs to be presented with considerations which will show him why he should initiate one set of physical changes rather than another, or rather than none at all; he needs guidance, that is, in the exercise of his will. Morality is thought of by many philosophers as one such guide.

I shall approach the difficulties I think I see in this whole picture by first considering some objections to this way of conceiving morality. I shall go on to examine some examples of human situations which I think point towards a wholly different account of what it is for a man to act, though, as I said, this is not something I shall be able to develop here.

To doubt the helpfulness of an account of morality as a guide to conduct is, of course, not to deny the existence of moral guidance. But our understanding of this term presupposes our understanding of the nature of the difficulties which occasion the need for guidance. Now these difficulties would

naturally be conceived as obstacles between a man and some goal he is trying to attain. And of course, men do try to attain goals and they do encounter obstacles in their way: lack of money, lack of various kinds of natural ability, lack of friends, opposition by other men, to name just a few. But morality has nothing much to do with helping people to overcome any of these. On the contrary, were it not for morality, they would often be a great deal easier to overcome. What are the difficulties, then, which morality can show us the way round? I do not know what answer can be given except to say that they are moral difficulties. For instance, a man devotes himself to building up a business and then finds that the whole enterprise will founder if he does not do something morally questionable—something perhaps that does not amount to legal fraud, and involves him in no risk of suffering ill repute amongst his fellows, but something nevertheless which he regards as morally inadmissible. Morality, we are told, is a guide which helps him round his difficulty. But were it not for morality, there would be no difficulty! This is a strange sort of guide, which first puts obstacles in our path and then shows us the way round them. Would it not be far simpler and more rational to be shot of the thing altogether? Then we could get on with the matter in hand, whatever it is.

This is in fact the substance of Glaucon's case in Book II of *The Republic*. The most desirable state of affairs for any individual would be to pursue his own concerns without any regard to morality. However, since to the extent that any individual does this, *other* individuals are going to be hindered from pursuing *their* own concerns, conventions are established to balance out opposing interests and promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number. To these conventions sanctions are attached, whether in the form of explicit legal penalties for infringements or, more informally, in the form of loss of friendship, co-operation and respect towards the

delinquent on the part of his fellow citizens. Given this sort of social structure, Glaucon agrees, it is in fact for the most part in a man's best interests to toe the line and therefore reasonable for him to do so. But suppose conditions were such that this were not so—conditions which Glaucon pictures dramatically with the story of the magical Ring of Gyges, which enables its owner to become invisible and thereby to do wrong with impunity—then, Glaucon argues, people would think the owner of the ring 'a miserable fool if they found him refusing to wrong his neighbours or to touch their belongings, though in public they would keep up a pretence of praising his conduct, for fear of being wronged themselves'.

Glaucon's challenge has haunted moral philosophy ever since, obviously in the case of those philosophers who have accepted the terms of his challenge, but also, as I shall try to show, in the case of others who, having seen that the challenge is unanswerable, have just ignored it.

Consider the case of John Stuart Mill. Mill accepts the starting point of his mentor, Jeremy Bentham, that since morality is a guide to conduct, the task of moral philosophy is to make it clear *towards* what morality is guiding men, then to show what is required in order to lead men safely to this goal. Hence Mill's first question concerns 'the *summum bonum*, or, what is the same thing ... the foundation of morality' and he immediately expands this into a question about the *ends* of human action. 'All action is for the sake of some end, and rules of action, it seems natural to suppose, must take their whole character and colour from the end to which they are subservient.'[1] Mill sees, quite rightly, that to make his case he has got to find an end which will recommend itself to any individual—since otherwise he will have produced no good reason to convince that individual that he *should* adopt morality as a guide to his conduct—and he

[1] J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chapter 1.

therefore asks what it is that is required in order to move any agent to action. His answer is that it is pleasure or the avoidance of pain and, on the basis of this result goes on to produce his famous (or perhaps notorious) 'proof' that the greatest happiness of the greatest number provides the supreme principle of morality.

I am not concerned here with the details of Mill's argument and want only to point out that, and why, it rests on the assumption that what is required is some consideration which any agent can see will make it worth his while to act (i.e. to initiate changes in the world) according to the requirements of morality. If action is interpreted thus, this issue has to be raised. For surely, if to act is to decide what changes I should bring about in the world I observe, then some considerations must be brought to bear which will, as it were, bring the various possibilities of change and non-change into relation with me, so that I can see that I have a reason for preferring one state of affairs to another. The initial interpretation of action—developed more explicitly by Mill in his *System of Logic*—separates the agent from the world in which he acts and, to make action intelligible, this gap has first to be bridged. And the concept of the agent's *interests* is the natural bridgehead on his side of the gap.

The terms of the question having been accepted, it is almost inevitable that the answer will be sought in the idea that, whereas in particular situations acting morally may be contrary to a man's interest, nevertheless, the general policy of thus acting cannot be. Mrs. Philippa Foot is one of the most recent of a long line of philosophers who have treated the question in this way.[2] She argues, with some force, against the Glauconian possibility of a man's making it a

[2] Cf. Philippa Foot, 'Moral Beliefs' in *Theories of Ethics*, edited by Philippa Foot (Oxford University Press, 1967); reprinted from *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Volume 59 (1958/9).

general policy to pay lip-service to morality, to present the appearance of respecting it, whilst actually having his eye purely on the main chance. Her argument is, roughly, that whilst morality is adopted as a guide out of self-interest, once it is adopted self-interest becomes subservient to considerations internal to morality. In fact this argument is a filling out of Mill's thesis that virtue, having initially been a means to a further end, namely happiness, becomes a part of that end.

In so far as Mrs. Foot is arguing that such Glauconian policy would be extremely difficult, I think she is undoubtedly right. But here Glaucon would have agreed with her: for his thesis is put forward in the context of a discussion about what would be rational for the strong man as opposed to the averagely weak. It is agreed that most men are not in fact strong enough to free themselves from the shackles of convention and the question is: But suppose that somebody could, what then? And anyway situations in which men actually can and do act in ways which they know to be wrong and get away with it are not, after all, far to seek. What can be said to show them that they would not be fools not to do so? *Moral* reasons can clearly not be used here as that would beg the question at issue. As Adeimanthus puts it in his supplement to Glaucon: 'When children are told by their fathers and all their pastors and masters that it is a good thing to be just, what is commended is not justice itself, but the respectability it brings.'

Adeimanthus's remark brings out very clearly the impossibility of answering Glaucon's question. For the question is: What advantage does morality bring? And the form of the question suggests that we must look *outside* morality for something on which morality can be based. But the moment we do this, then 'what is commended is not morality itself', for surely if the commendation is in terms of some further advantage, the connection between that advantage and morality can only be a contingent one. And it does not matter how strong a

contingent connection it is; it will still not be 'morality itself' which is being commended.

Now it may with justice be said here that the impossibility in principle of answering Glaucon's question simply shows that it is a pseudo-question. And there is indeed confusion in the way Glaucon expresses himself. Nevertheless, what has brought him into this confusion is a perception, an insight into where men stand with regard to morality, which those who avoid his confusion may miss.

This point can be filled out by considering the case of some philosophers who have not followed Mill in attempting a 'proof of the supreme principle of morality'. This is true, for instance, of Sidgwick, Moore and Prichard. Indeed, Prichard argued very incisively against the possibility of any such proof in 'Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?'. What is noteworthy about these philosophers, however, is that they have tried to replace such a 'proof' with notions like 'self-evidence' and 'intuition'. They have shown thereby that, clearly as they may have seen the hopelessness of trying to answer Glaucon on his own terms, they have not quite grasped the radical worry which underlay his question. For the effect of words like these is to suggest a sort of justification, whilst freeing oneself from the burden of actually supplying any. And if a rationalistically-minded philosopher thinks that my attitude to Glaucon's question is obscurantist, my retort is that this 'intuitionist' move is much more so.

The case of G. E. Moore is particularly relevant. In *Principia Ethica* Moore argues that there are three great divisions of ethical inquiry. The first concerns the question: What is the meaning of the word 'good'?; the second: What things are good in themselves?, and the third: What things are related as causes to that which is good in itself? It is only with the third question that Moore thinks we reach consideration of human conduct. Thus Moore does not see morality as a device for enabling men to reach non-moral ends; but rather

as involving ends of its own peculiar sort—goods. Now this approach does indeed evade part of the objection which I raised at the start of this lecture to the conception of morality as a guide to conduct. For along with the idea that morality involves the pursuit of ends peculiar to itself goes the possibility that there may be difficulties in the way of attaining those ends which are peculiar to morality, in so far, for example, as the attainment of one moral end may conflict with the attainment of another. But Moore's account involves difficulties of its own, of which perhaps the most fundamental is this. If, as Moore says, to say that something is good is simply to state a fact about it, then surely some further argument is needed in order to show why a man should aim at producing something of that kind. This demand is likely to be made especially strongly by someone to whom it seems—not obviously falsely—that the difficulty and distress involved in morality considerably outweighs the satisfaction involved in the so-called 'attainment of moral ends'. It is plainly not enough for Moore to rest his case on the contingent fact that men happen to want to produce things which are good, and indeed he does not do so. He thinks rather that it is just self-evident that men ought to do what will produce good things. As John Anderson has pointed out,[3] in the most incisive criticism of Moore's ethics that I know, Moore fails to see the difficulty here because of the way he talks about the intrinsically good as that which is 'desirable in itself'; that is, as Anderson puts it, he smuggles into what is supposed to be simply a property of something the idea of an essential relation which that thing is supposed to have to something else: namely, being desired by, or required of, human beings. So he gives the impression of having offered a reason why men should behave morally without in fact having done so.

It is characteristic of many of the philosophers I have

[3] Cf. John Anderson, 'The Meaning of Good' in *Studies in Empirical Philosophy* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1962).

mentioned that they think of the relation of morality to conduct in terms of the reason a man has for doing one thing rather than another. A philosopher of very different style who has sharply criticized this conception is Jean-Paul Sartre who said, perhaps with exaggeration but still with point, that when I come to deliberate—to consider reasons for and against doing something—'*les jeux sont faits*' ('the chips are down').[4] If we wish to understand the moral character of a particular man and his acts it is, often at any rate, not enough to notice that, for such and such reasons, he chooses a given course of action from among those he considers as alternatives. It may be at least as important to notice *what he considers the alternatives to be* and, what is closely connected, what are the reasons he considers it relevant to deploy in deciding between them. Thus one kind of difference between two men is that in which, agreeing about what the issues are with which their identical situations present them, they decide differently in the light of those issues. But an even more important difference—and the kind Sartre is alluding to—is that in which they cannot even agree in their descriptions of the situation and in their account of the issues raised by it. For one man, for instance, a situation will raise a moral issue; for another, it will not.

Let me express this point by saying that a situation, the issues which it raises and the kind of reason which is appropriate to a discussion of those issues, involve a certain perspective. If I had to say shortly how I take the agent in the situation to be related to such a perspective I should say, as I think would Sartre, that the agent *is* this perspective. I should not follow Sartre much further here. I think he is led badly astray by his failure to see clearly that the *possibility* of there being a certain perspective on a situation cannot be led back

[4] Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, translated by Hazel E. Barnes, Part 4, Chapter 1 (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956).

to any agent's choice. It depends rather on the language which is available, a language which is not any individual's invention—though again Sartre often talks as if it is.

I have avoided equating the perspective from which an action is performed with the notion of an agent's 'will'. My reasons for this can be brought out by considering some difficulties in the account of action implicit in Kant's moral philosophy. What is distinctive about Kant's starting point is his refusal to locate that 'which could be held good without qualification' in any state of affairs which the human will could bring about by its actions, but rather in the 'good will' itself.[5] But Kant is very unclear about how we should conceive the relation between a man's will and his actions. He thinks of the will as a certain sort of *causal* principle and this is a conception he shares with his Utilitarian opponents, even though he and they no doubt give very different accounts of the kind of causality which is supposed to be involved. In line with this conception Kant finds it necessary to produce guiding rules for the will, instructing it as to which phenomenal changes it shall bring about and which not. What he does *not* see is that this project is quite incompatible with his view that the *summum bonum* is located in the will itself. Though he tries to base these guiding rules on the mere concept of the good will, it is clear that he is in fact forced to fall back on precisely that kind of utilitarian consideration which he has rejected as irrelevant to morality. Bentham saw this and concluded that anyone who wishes to produce rules for the guidance of the will in morality cannot but be a more or less disguised utilitarian. There may be some force in this. But it does not follow, as Bentham thought, that Utilitarianism is the only viable moral philosophy. Another possible conclusion is that it is thoroughly misconceived to suppose that philosophy can provide rules for the moral guidance of the will at all,

[5] Immanuel Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*,

The difficulties in Kant's conception of the will are closely connected with difficulties in his conception of rationality. (Indeed he identifies the will with practical reason.) From the fact that logical principles cannot be understood as empirical generalizations Kant concludes that rationality must be a purely *a priori* concept—as if the rationality manifested in actual human behaviour were simply an application of principles the validity of which can be understood quite apart from their empirical applications. Since he thinks of moral conduct as a particular sort of application of such *a priori* principles, he supposes that we have a criterion *a priori* for deciding whether any given piece of behaviour is morally right or not. The criterion is to the effect that a piece of behaviour is morally right if and only if it has been performed for the sake of a rational principle itself, that is, according to Kant's argument, for the sake of duty. But, as I have suggested, Kant is unable to give 'duty' any content without falling back on other, non-formal, considerations so that our recognition of actual kinds of behaviour as cases of 'acting for the sake of duty' are found to depend, contrary to Kant's most fundamental intentions, on kinds of fact which *cannot* be regarded as 'good with qualification'. My conclusion is borne out if we turn from abstract argument to examination of actual cases.

Mrs. Solness, in Ibsen's *The Master Builder*, is someone who is obsessed with the Kantian idea of 'acting for the sake of duty'. She does not appear, though, as a paragon of moral purity but rather as a paradigm of a certain sort of moral corruption. No doubt her constant appeal to duty is a defence against the dangerous and evil resentments she harbours within her. For all that, it is possible to think that the situation would have been a good deal less evil if she had occasionally forgotten her 'duty' and let herself go. At least this might have cleared the air and opened the way for some genuine

human relationships between herself and her fellow-characters —relationships which are conspicuously lacking in the scene as Ibsen presents it. It may be said that it is unfair to Kant to take such a corrupt case of 'acting for the sake of duty' as this. But my point is that Kant's treatment stands in the way of seeing just what is corrupt about Mrs. Solness's case. For Kant has insisted that the good will is the *only* thing of which a corrupt case cannot be found. My argument is that his attempt to give positive criteria of the good will in terms of maxims regarded as universally valid laws of conduct is incompatible with that initial contention. In this matter Kierkegaard is much clearer-headed than Kant. Kierkegaard does not try to say what 'purity of heart' consists in, rather he discusses directly the application of the concept to particular examples. In this discussion the emphasis is on various kinds of corruption, or doublemindedness. Kierkegaard's procedure may be characterized by way of a distinction of Wittengenstein's. He does not attempt to *say* what purity of heart is; he *shows* what it is by portraying various cases.

Kant's position not only forces us to accept as 'good without qualification' kinds of behaviour which we may quite legitimately think are not. It also prevents us from recognizing as 'good without qualification' kinds of behaviour which we may quite legitimately think are. Thus Simone Weil offers as an example of an absolutely 'pure' action the case of a father playing with his child—not out of a sense of duty but out of pure joy and pleasure. Kant would have to classify this as a case of acting from 'inclination' rather than from 'practical reason' and hence as possessing no moral value, though he might perhaps allow that it is aesthetically pleasing. But let us consider the case of a man who finds himself unable to enjoy himself spontaneously with his child; though he goes out of his way to entertain the child out of a sense of his duty as a father. May he not quite well regard his relative lack of

spontaneity, *vis-à-vis* the father in Simone Weil's example, as a *moral* failing? Can he not, without confusion, regard himself as 'a worse man' than the other?[6] And would that be an 'aesthetic' judgment?

Now some people will have objections to my way of treating these examples. It may, first, be thought that, in emphasizing the positive value of spontaneity I am offering an alternative to Kant's 'acting for the sake of duty' as that which is good without qualification. And to this it could rightly be objected that there are other cases where I should have to agree that acting as one spontaneously felt inclined to would be quite wrong and where it would be right to curb one's inclinations from considerations of what duty requires. With this I completely agree; but it is not an objection to anything that I want to say. For I am not trying to *replace* Kant's contention that acting for the sake of duty is the only kind of behaviour which is good without qualification with the counter-contention that acting spontaneously is the only kind of behaviour which is good without qualification. On the contrary, my contention is that there is *no* general kind of behaviour of which we have to say that it is good without qualification. Kant's mistake, that is, lies in trying to fill out the view that only the good will can be called good without qualification with a positive account of the kind of behaviour in which a good will *must* manifest itself. All we can do, I am arguing, is to look at particular examples and see what we *do* want to say about them; there are no general rules which can determine in advance what we *must* say about them.

But doesn't this result in making what we happen to say about any particular case entirely arbitrary? No more than many of the things we say in countless other dimensions than

[6] I say that someone *might* think like this; of course it is also possible for someone to make a contrary judgment. But my complaint against Kant here is not that he gets things the wrong way round: rather, that he claims that there is only one way round to get them.

the moral are arbitrary. If I am asked what colour this desk is, I shall call it 'brown'. But how should I justify calling it brown? I could not do this; this is just what I call brown. Is it not, though, that there is a general rule laying down that I shall call 'brown' only things which resemble other things in a certain respect? But in what respect? In respect of being brown! To specify the respect in which this desk has to resemble other things if I am to be justified in calling it brown, my willingness to call it brown is already presupposed. And that is no justification at all.

The question of what it is to attribute an action to an agent is one which greatly exercised Kant. His position was that where an action is performed 'from inclination' the cause of the action does not lie in the agent himself and the action is, therefore, not 'autonomously' the agent's. And he mistakenly thought that the idea of 'acting for the sake of something' had to be emphasized if such autonomy were to be accounted for at all. The weight of Kant's case rests on his treatment of the way in which two outwardly similar pieces of behaviour may nevertheless differ completely in moral significance.

A man who repays a debt to avoid criminal proceedings may happen to act 'in accordance with duty' but he is very differently related to his act from the man who repays the debt simply because he owes it, without thought of any unpleasant consequences to him ensuing from his not paying it. The obvious importance of the distinction between these two cases should not blind us to the possibility that Kant's account of it is faulty. His account consists basically in seeing the relation of the act to the agent in terms of the principle, or 'maxim', according to which the agent is supposed to be acting. But this account will not cover all cases.

Is it right to say that the man who repays the money because he owes it, and not out of fear of the debtor's prison, is acting 'for the sake of duty'? Well, I feel like saying that the

man whose guiding thought is 'He lent me this money and I must repay it', different as he is from the man whose thought is 'If I don't repay it I shall be sent to prison', is just as importantly different from the man whose thought is 'I must repay this money in order to fulfil my duty'. Perhaps the distinction is clearer if we return to the case of Mrs. Solness. When Hilda Wangel arrives at the Solnesses' house as a guest, Mrs. Solness, in splendid Kantian tones, says: 'I'll do my best for you. That's no more than my duty.'[7] How very differently we should have regarded her if she had said: 'Do come and see your room. I hope you will be comfortable there and enjoy your stay.' Certainly in the latter case the conception of the relation between host and guest and the duties involved in that relation would still enter into our understanding of the situation, but not in the form of something 'for the sake of which' the action is performed. Similarly in the case of Simone Weil's example of father playing with child: the force of the example does depend on what we understand of the relation between father and child, which does include, of course, the idea of certain duties and responsibilities; but equally the force of the example depends on the fact that the father is not behaving as he is for the sake of fulfilling his duties. I also want to resist a suggestion that many philosophers would make here: namely that the father is doing what he is doing 'for its own sake'. The trouble with this locution is that it makes his behaviour *too like* that in which a man does what he does for the sake of something else—as if the father thought that a situation in which a parent plays with his child has positive value in itself and played with his child *for that reason*, rather than because he thought that doing so would be conducive to further consequences which he positively valued. That is a possible case too; but it is not the sort of case which Simone Weil presents us with, nor is it

[7] Henrik Ibsen, *The Master Builder*, Act I.

a sort of case which she would have described as having the sort of 'purity' which she does ascribe to her actual example.

We might speak of the father in this example as 'absorbed in' what he is doing and my suggestion is that we do not always need to think of a man's action as performed by him in accordance with some principle ('maxim') in order to think of it as unequivocally *his* act and to attach moral value to it. The case of Oedipus may make clearer what I am saying. Here we might almost want to speak of Oedipus as having been 'absorbed by' what he has done. Oedipus did not intend to kill his father and marry his mother; he would have acted differently if he had known the true nature of what he was doing but was in a position in which, in an important sense, it was not within his power to know this. On Kantian principles what we *must* say here is that Oedipus is in no way responsible for his actions (at least under these descriptions) and that no question of blame can possibly arise.

Now I realize that many people would in fact say this and I have nothing to say here against someone who, as a matter of fact, takes such a view. I do, however, have something to say against a philosopher who argues, on Kantian lines, that this is the only possible coherent view to take. Oedipus undoubtedly blamed himself for what he had done. Was this irrational of him in view of the circumstances? Well, there is one important feature of the situation which we should not lose sight of, namely that Oedipus had *done* those things—married his mother and killed his father, even if he had not intended them. For this reason his perspective on those happenings was quite different from that of an onlooker on natural happenings. I do not find it at all difficult to understand that he should blame himself in these circumstances; neither do I feel inclined to say that it was irrational for him to do so. I do not say this from any facile idea that 'Greek moral concepts were quite different from ours'. My point is

that people seem to me over-hasty in asserting that our contemporary moral concepts preclude the possibility of a judgment like this.

When I say 'I can understand Oedipus blaming himself', I do not of course mean that I should want to blame him too. That is a different issue. Blaming oneself is quite a different matter from blaming other people—a difference which is marked by our having a special word for it: 'remorse'. If Oedipus had intended what he did, I might indeed think it appropriate for me to blame him. As it is, the appropriate reaction is surely one of pity, the attitude which Sophocles' play invites from us. But for what are we invited to pity him? Not, I think, just for the terrible consequences which befall him when his deeds are discovered, for though we could indeed pity another man to whom, for quite different reasons, such things happened, it would not be the same sort of pity. The pity we feel for Oedipus is inextricably connected with our realization of what he has *done* and with our understanding that these are actions for which he could not help blaming himself. What makes the consequences so terrible is precisely *what* they are consequences *of*; they are, as it were, the vehicle which carries our understanding of what Oedipus is by virtue of what he has done. But the moral character of Oedipus' situation would have been the same, even if there had been no such consequences; and we could still have pitied him.

Let me consider another sort of case. In a film called 'Violent Saturday', which I saw many years ago, a gang of bank raiders hide from the police on the farm of a strict, Dukhobor-like religious community, one of whose most fundamental guiding principles is non-violence. At the climax of the film one of the gangsters is about to shoot a young girl member of the community in the presence of the community's elder. With horror and doubt showing on his face, the elder seizes a pitchfork and hurls it into the gangster's back.

How are we to describe the elder's position? According to a neo-Kantian position like Professor Hare's, the elder has had to make a 'decision of principle', which consists in either qualifying, or perhaps even abandoning, the principle of non-violence according to which he has hitherto tried to live. But several features of the situation seem to me to speak against this account. In the first place, it is quite clear that the elder thinks he has done something *wrong* in killing the gangster. It is not that he has abandoned or qualified his commitment to the principle of non-violence. The whole point of this principle, in the context of the religious life of the community, would be lost if it were thought of as subject to qualification in this way; and the life of the community still represents the elder's highest ideal—so he cannot be thought of as having abandoned the principle.

But in the second place, it is equally clear that the elder would think that in some sense he 'had no choice' in the situation. That is how he *had to* act and if he had acted differently he would not have been able to forgive himself. My use of phrases like 'had to' and 'would not have been able to' in that last sentence may encourage some philosophers to think that what is in question here is a conflict between a moral demand—in this case the principle of non-violence—and something 'purely psychological', a Kantian 'inclination'. Now I do not find the concept of the 'purely psychological' as luminous as some appear to, but in so far as there is an implied *contrast* here between the psychological and the moral, I am quite sure that this account will not do. I said that, having killed the gangster, the elder knew he had done something wrong; but I also said that, if he had not killed the gangster, he would not have been able to forgive himself; i.e. that would have been wrong too, though perhaps in a different way. That the modalities involved on the side of killing the gangster are moral modalities is also clear from the

fact that, in order to explicate them, notions like that of the innocence of the girl whose life was threatened and that of protecting the defenceless would have to be introduced. But it would be wrong to introduce them in the form of principles for the sake of which the elder was acting. They are involved in what I have called the 'perspective' of the action, but that perspective is not to be understood in the form of Kantian 'maxims' or Harean 'principles'. It will be objected that my account leaves no room for any discovery of, or decision concerning, '*the* right' thing to do in such a situation and thus makes morality useless as a guide to conduct. But my whole point is that there *is* no room for the notion of 'the right thing to do' in such a situation and that this shows yet again that morality is *wrongly* conceived as a guide to conduct.

This case could serve to exemplify a remark by J. L. Stocks. Stocks argued strongly against the possibility of understanding morality in terms of the means–end relationship and said that morality can require that we abandon absolutely any specifiable end, *including the end of one's own moral perfection.*[8] In my example the elder's ideal of moral perfection included adherence to the principle of non-violence. I have been arguing that in acting against that principle he neither abandoned that ideal nor succumbed to a non-moral temptation.

Now in some ways a better way of expressing the truth in Stocks's remark might be to say that one's own moral perfection is not a possible end of one's conduct at all and, *a fortiori*, not a possible moral end. This, I think, is made clear in my last example, which comes from Tolstoy's story, 'Father Sergius'. This example may also serve to connect my intervening argument more closely with what I said earlier about Plato's Glaucon.

[8] Cf. J. L. Stocks, *Morality and Purpose*, edited with an introduction by D. Z. Phillips (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, forthcoming).

Sergius is a man who suddenly abandons the brilliant military career which lies before him to become a monk. 'By becoming a monk he showed contempt for all that seemed most important to others and had seemed so to him while he was in the service, and he now ascended a height from which he could look down on those he had formerly envied. But it was not this alone, as his sister Varvára supposed, that influenced him. There was also something else—a sincere religious feeling which Varvára did not know, which intertwined itself with the feeling of pride and the desire for pre-eminence, and guided him' (p. 307).[9]

An important point which I must make here is that the 'religious feeling' and the 'desire for pre-eminence', of which Tolstoy speaks, must not be regarded as two quite distinct motives which are contingently intermingled. It is essential to understanding the story and to the philosophical point which I want to make to see that the one is a corrupt form of the other.

Sergius shines as brightly as a monk as he had as an officer and eventually becomes a hermit, with a great reputation for saintliness, and crowds visit him, bringing their sick to be healed. In the middle of his career a young society woman visits him alone in the night and tries to seduce him. To defend himself against temptation Sergius takes an axe and chops off one of his fingers.

As the years go on and his saintly reputation increases, Sergius's religious doubts begin to get the upper hand. At the climax of these doubts an intellectually feeble young girl, who has been sent to him for healing, offers herself to him and he succumbs to the temptation. ' "What is your name?" he asked, trembling all over and feeling that he was overcome and that his desire had already passed beyond control.

[9] Leo Tolstoy, *The Kreutzer Sonata and Other Tales* (London: The World's Classics, 1960). All quotations are from this edition.

"Marie. Why?" She took his hand and kissed it, and then put her arm round his waist and pressed him to herself. "What are you doing?" he said. "Marie, you are a devil!" "Oh, perhaps. What does it matter?" And embracing him she sat down with with him on the bed' (p. 343).

My reason for quoting that piece of dialogue lies in Marie's Glauconian question, 'What does it matter?' Sergius's tragedy was that, from the perspective which he had come to occupy *vis-à-vis* his religious life, he could no longer see that it did matter. Earlier in the story there is the following passage:

'The sources of [his inner conflict] were two: doubts, and the lust of the flesh. And these two enemies always appeared together. It seemed to him that they were two foes, but in reality they were one and the same. As soon as doubt was gone so was the lustful desire. But thinking them to be two different fiends he fought them separately.'

I think the point is this. Earlier, Sergius had been able to overcome his lust by chopping off his finger. He could do this because, at that stage, the problem presented to him by his lust was understood by him from the perspective of a genuine religious belief. That is to say it was not then a case of setting the satisfaction of his desire alongside the demands of his religion and choosing between them. The fulfilment of his religious duties was not then for him an object to be achieved. But this is what it *had* become for him at the time he succumbed to temptation and this indeed is precisely why he succumbed. Marie's question 'What does it matter?' invited a judgment explaining why religious purity is more important than the satisfaction of lust, a comparison, as it were, between two different objects. And no such judgment was possible. I do not mean that earlier, at the time of his strength, Sergius *could* have answered the question; the point is that, from that earlier perspective, the question did not arise for him.

All this is brought out superbly well in further passages from the story. Shortly before his fall Sergius has a discussion about religion with (save the mark!) 'a sceptical young professor'. Afterwards he meditates alone.

' "Can I have fallen so low?" he thought. "Lord, help me! Restore me, my Lord and God!" And he clasped his hands and began to pray.

'The nightingales burst into song, a cockchafer knocked against him and crept up the back of his neck. He brushed it off. "But does He exist? What if I am knocking at a door fastened from outside? The bar is on the door for all to see. Nature—the nightingales and the cockchafers—is that bar." Perhaps the young man was right' (p. 342).

In a letter to his aunt Tolstoy once wrote, speaking from a perspective very different from that of Father Sergius: 'For me, religion comes from life, not life from religion. You scoff at my nature and nightingales. But in my religion, nature is the intermediary.'[10] Now it would be confused to ask here who is right, Sergius or Tolstoy in his letter. It cannot be demonstrated that nature is either a bar or an intermediary; but one can see how it may manifest itself as either one or the other according to the perspective of the agent. Sergius looked for a demonstration, much as Glaucon looked for a demonstration that justice is preferable to injustice. To do this he contemplated the religious life as an object and asked what there was about it which made it worth while. But just as Adeimanthus noted that when people commend justice, what they commend 'is not justice itself, but the respectability it brings', so Sergius found that if he tried to commend the religious life, what he was commending was not that at all, but the kudos and admiration it brought him.

[10] Henri Troyat, *Tolstoy*, translated by Nancy Amphoux, p. 186. (London: W. H. Allen, 1968).

'They told him that people needed him, and that fulfilling Christ's law of love he could not refuse their demand to see him, and that to avoid them would be cruel. He could not but agree with this, but the more he gave himself up to such a life the more he felt that what was internal became external, and that the fount of living water within him dried up, and that what he did now was done more and more for men and less and less for God. . . . He thought himself a shining light, and the more he felt this the more was he conscious of a weakening, a dying down of the divine light of truth that shone within him' (p. 332).

I think the situation is something like this. If one looks at a certain style of life and asks what there is in it which makes it worth while, one will find nothing there. One may indeed describe it in terms which bring out 'what one sees in it', but the use of these terms already presupposes that one does see it from a perspective from which it matters. The words will fall flat on the ears of someone who does not occupy such a perspective even though he is struggling to attain it. If one tries to find in the object of contemplation that which makes it admirable, what one will in fact see is the admiration and applause which surrounds it. So one will see oneself perhaps as a prospective object of such admiration. And then what one is aiming at is to be such an object of admiration. 'What was internal becomes external.'

It may now be asked what is so attractive about being an object of admiration; and this is a pertinent question. Of course, if one is an object of admiration this may as a matter of fact be of assistance to one's further designs by, for example, bringing with it power or money. But it is not just that that one values in admiration; one values it precisely *as* admiration. This too is well brought out in the description of Sergius: the form which people's admiration of him took was

positively burdensome to him and yet he could not help feeling pleasure in it. 'He was oppressed and wearied by visitors, but at the bottom of his heart he was glad of their presence and glad of the praise they heaped upon him' (p. 332). But to understand people's behaviour as constituting admiration is to understand it as directed towards something good, something worthy of admiration. So the thought of something as really worthy of admiration is indeed involved when anyone takes pleasure in being admired. Only this thought is corrupted.

I think it is an important task for philosophy to make clear the distinction between corrupt and non-corrupt forms of the thought that something is worthy of admiration. But neither it, nor any other form of inquiry, can show what *is* worthy of admiration. The idea that it can is itself a form of corruption and always involves an obscuring of possibilities. The reason why I think this should be clear from my treatment of Kant. Philosophy may indeed try to remove intellectual obstacles in the way of recognizing certain possibilities (though there is always the danger that it will throw up new obstacles). But what a man makes of the possibilities he can comprehend is a matter of what man he is. This is revealed in the way he lives; it is revealed *to him* in his understanding of what he can and what he cannot attach importance to. But philosophy can no more show a man what he should attach importance to than geometry can show a man where he should stand.

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